

Mayor's Column for the October 19, 2011 Evansville Review

Last week I attended the day-long 2011 Wisconsin Lean Government Conference at Monona Terrace in Madison. Two hundred attendees spent the day exploring lean thinking and related methods and concepts to improve delivery of services by operating more efficiently and effectively.

Many of the participants were representatives of local governments. It is budget time for municipalities and school districts and an atmosphere of determination and urgency was prevalent at the meeting.

Wisconsin local government information provided at the beginning of the conference was evidence of the need for immediate change in the delivery of services by municipalities. Revenue for local governments has been down the last five years. There has been a 58% increase in government retirements in Wisconsin this year, resulting in a huge loss of expertise. There is intense competition for jobs and an intense competition for talent. Citizen demands for service are increasing.

An overview of lean thinking provided a solid foundation for much of the information presented during the day. Lean is a philosophy of continuous improvement by removing obstacles that prevent efficient, effective service. It is about maximizing customer service and value by minimizing waste and using fewer resources. It is about getting the right service in the right amount to the right person at the right time. The goal of lean is to seek perfection; there is no end to the process of reducing effort, mistakes, and cost.

A session by Tim Hallock, Quality Management Director of the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, gave these examples of waste in service delivery:

- Delay: customers waiting for service or a response; standing in line; service not provided when promised.
- Duplication: having to re-enter data, repeat details on forms, answering same questions asked by different departments of same organization.
- Unnecessary movement: poor ergonomics at service counter; lack of one-stop service, requiring standing in several lines.
- Unclear communication: need to get clarification; complicated instructions and forms; confusing directions to meeting or office location.
- Incorrect inventory: out-of-stock; service and product substitutions.
- Lost opportunity to win or retain customers: rudeness, unfriendliness; ignoring customers.

- Transaction errors: mistakes in providing service; not providing appropriate customer need.

Effective lean is a way of thinking and acting for an entire organization. It requires an attitude of being flexible and open to change. Lean is not about downsizing an organization. It is about becoming more efficient and effective in providing top-notch customer service. In growing communities, eliminating waste in existing customer service can allow resources to be re-allocated to additional services.

Government officials from Iowa and Indiana presented examples of lean initiatives implemented in their states. The need to keep up with infrastructure needs as an underpinning of lean was stressed. Other speakers explained different methods and tools available to accomplish lean government.

Some of the methods are Lean Six Sigma, value stream mapping, total quality management, performance-based budgeting, and 5s. I attended sessions explaining the basics of 5s, value stream mapping, and performance-based budgeting. These tools provide different ways of analyzing a given service to allow insight as to possible changes and simplification that can improve the service.

There are basic requirements necessary for successful long-term lean government operation. Commitment and engagement of senior leadership is the most important factor. Leaders need to walk the talk.

It is extremely important for senior leadership to focus on building future leaders. Building lean capacity through leadership development will lead to successful change. It is of higher priority than completing specific lean projects. Lean operation is 90% people-based and 10% tools-based.

Organizations have to become willing to change. A culture shift is necessary; trying new things and abandoning inefficiencies are often initially difficult. The seven deadly words: "We have always done it this way."

Lean requires long-term thinking. It is likely to take 2-5 years to reach initial measurable success with specific lean projects. It can take 10 years to obtain the organizational transformation to lean thinking.

Speakers suggested beginning with a single lean project to address a service problem or inefficiency. Build upon success from one project to address another service area needing improvement. Multiple successes will lead to pervasive culture change.

The Evansville Common Council held a strategic planning session this summer. The council voiced continued commitment to providing quality service to our citizens and addressing community infrastructure needs when required. Lean government initiatives provide an avenue for meeting Council objectives.

Becoming a member/owner of WPPI Energy in 2006 and fully utilizing the WPPI benefits and programs have had lean results for Evansville. Joint purchasing of electrical energy and utility supplies, using the WPPI expertise for preparing rate cases, and their assistance in implementing customer energy efficiency programs have significantly enhanced customer service and reduced costs.

Other examples of Evansville lean are shared services through participation in the Arrowhead Library System and the Evansville Fire District. There are likely opportunities to use lean tools to further enhance and improve service in these collaborations.

This month we will begin installation of a significant software upgrade to our municipal accounting processes, leading to consolidation of our utility and general operations records into one system. Resulting simplification of work and reduction of duplication are lean improvements that are long-term.

Additional lean initiatives are essential as we continue to do more with less. You will be hearing more about Evansville lean initiatives in the future. Our citizens want effective, efficient, quality services, leveraging scarce tax dollars for maximum impact. We are committed to working continuously to accomplish lean.

Community Announcements

The annual meeting of the Evansville Grove Society will be held on Thursday evening, October 20, at 7:00 p.m. at Creekside Place, 102 Maple. Street. Featured speaker Joe DeRose, Registration and Survey Historian of the Wisconsin Historical Society, will talk about Evansville's distinctive architecture.

The Evansville Farmer's Market will include a craft fair on Saturday, October 22, from 9 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on East Church Street next to Creekside Place.

The annual meeting of the electors of the Evansville School District will be held on Monday, October 24, in the High School media room at 7:00 p.m.

Our community is encouraged to "Get Your Pink On" on Wednesday, October 26. The Evansville Police Department, EMS, and Fire Department are fundraising to support breast cancer research, with proceeds going to the Susan G. Komen for the Cure organization.

Kopecky's Piggly Wiggly will celebrate a grand re-opening on Wednesday, October 26, at 10:00 a.m.

Halloween trick-or-treat will be on Monday, October 31, from 5 to 7 p.m.

Community Gratitude and Thanks

Evansville grieves the loss of a devoted resident and dedicated community volunteer. We are grateful for Phil Montgomery's more than half a century of service to the Evansville Fire Department. I will miss seeing his smile and friendly wave from the cab of his shiny blue pick-up truck. Rest in peace, Phil.

Our community thanks the Evansville Boy Scouts for their recent food drive to support the Evansville Food Pantry.